

VZCZCXRO0933  
RR RUEHBI RUEHCI  
DE RUEHCG #1856/01 2371105  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 251105Z AUG 06  
FM AMCONSUL CHENNAI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9453  
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1909  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4836  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0579  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 1252

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHENNAI 001856

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: TAMIL NADU CONGRESS PRESSES DMK TO TAKE FIRM STAND AGAINST LTTE

REF: Chennai 1816 and previous

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A quiet walk-out of Congress legislators from the Tamil Nadu assembly on August 22 brought into media focus the policy differences between the DMK and the Congress -- partners in the UPA alliance -- on the sensitive Sri Lankan Tamil issue. Despite the tactical show of protest, however, Congress sources confided to Post that DMK-Congress relations remain cordial. The Congress continues to trust Karunanidhi's skills in balancing between the party's Pan-Tamil sympathies and the GOI's security concerns. END SUMMARY.

-----  
CONGRESS DEMUR DMK'S TOLERANCE OF LTTE SUPPORTERS  
-----

2. (SBU) On August 22, Congress legislators quietly walked out of the Tamil Nadu Assembly, mildly registering their dissent on the DMK government's perceived tolerance of Tamil Nadu's LTTE supporters. The low-key walk-out was officially undeclared and lasted only a few minutes. It generated much media interest, however, due to the significance of DMK-Congress relations both at the Center and in the state: while the UPA government at the Center survives on DMK support, the Congress party is one of the main supporters of the DMK's minority government in Tamil Nadu.

-----  
VAIKO'S SPEECH CAUSES THE FLUTTER  
-----

3. (SBU) The walkout was fallout from MDMK leader Vaiko's August 21 pro-LTTE speech at a party meeting in Chennai. The media widely reported the speech in which Vaiko cited his earlier warning to Prime Minister Singh that any Indian assistance to GoSL would lead to a "Kashmir-like situation" in Tamil Nadu. "Tamil Eelam (an independent Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka) is the only solution to the Sri Lankan ethnic issue and no force on earth can prevent it," Vaiko stated, criticizing the GOI's position that the issue should be resolved within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. Vaiko also called for a demonstration at the Sri Lankan High Commission in New Delhi on August 30 and a rally in Chennai on September 1 to condemn the GoSL's "atrocities" against the Tamils.

4. (SBU) Chief Minister Karunanidhi made light of Vaiko's speech and advised his angry Congress allies not to attach too much significance to it. The Chief Minister reiterated that his government is with the Centre on this issue and will continue to support the decisions taken by the Centre. He later assured the Congress legislators on their return to the Assembly that the law will take its own course against whoever speaks in a manner which poses a challenge to the unity and integrity of India.

5. (SBU) On August 23, two local Congress workers went further and

lodged a police complaint demanding the arrest of Vaiko. In 2002, Vaiko had been arrested under the now defunct Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) for making a similar speech at Madurai and was kept in prison for 19 months by the former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa.

-----  
DMK-CONGRESS RELATIONS INTACT, SAYS CONGRESS LEADER  
-----

¶16. (SBU) Notwithstanding the tactical show of displeasure, Congress' Chief Whip in the Assembly, Peter Alphonse, told Post on August 24 that DMK-Congress relations remain cordial. "We have no problems; we are sailing in the same boat," he said. According to Alphonse, the Chief Minister himself is happy that, with the Congress' strong views on the issue, he can take strong action against LTTE supporters, should that become necessary. Alphonse believes the views expressed by the Congress will help the DMK remain firm against any pro-LTTE activity in Tamil Nadu.

¶17. (SBU) The Congress leaders were reassured by recent action by the Tamil Nadu police. On August 19, the MDMK's South Chennai district secretary Manimaran was arrested on the charge of making an

SIPDIS

"inflammatory speech" on August 17 in support of the outlawed LTTE.

¶18. (SBU) Journalist sources point out that the DMK has realized there is little electoral gain to be had from supporting the LTTE. Although a few party workers remain sympathetic to the LTTE and its supporter Vaiko, DMK decisions are more influenced by leaders, such as Union Minister Dayanidhi Maran, who attach greater value to the party's relations with the Congress. Following Maran's major tiff with Vaiko during the May state elections, five DMK MPs had formally asked Prime Minister Singh in June for increased security for Maran

CHENNAI 00001856 002 OF 002

and demanded close scrutiny of Vaiko's international connections.

-----  
LTTE-CRITICS SUPPORT U.S. ARRESTS  
-----

¶19. (SBU) Meanwhile, the arrest of 13 LTTE-related persons in the U.S. received coverage in South Indian media but passed off without popular reaction. At an American Chamber of Commerce breakfast on August 24, N. Ram, Editor-in-Chief of The Hindu, applauded the tough line taken by the USG and criticized the softer position of the Europeans. Speaking with us later, Ram was particularly scathing toward Scandinavians whom he believed were confused or oblivious to the tactics employed by the LTTE. Ram believes the LTTE will never achieve its objective of a separate state, but neither was it possible to forcibly suppress the desire for such a state among many Tamils.

-----  
THE BALANCING ACT WILL CONTINUE  
-----

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT: Although the DMK still displays sympathies toward the Sri Lankan Tamil cause, there seems to be no willingness to confront the GOI, which itself refrains from provocative actions about Sri Lanka out of respect for Tamil sentiments. Unless the Government of Sri Lanka causes major problems to the GoTN through sustained attacks on Tamil civilians or on fleeing refugees, Karunanidhi's balancing act will continue. END COMMENT. HOPPER